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John McCardell
Minority Students

A Report on Recruiting and Retention of Minority Students as Presented to the Admissions Long Range Planning Committee

by Arlinda Ardister, Assistant Dean of Students - July 21, 1986

I am glad that the President has asked for an in-depth look at the admissions situation and that special attention will be given to recruitment and retention of minority students. In a large part, Middlebury College has enjoyed a successful history in the education of minority students. We graduated the first black American, and the doors have continued to be open to people of color. Many schools made efforts in reaction to the political climate of the civil rights movement, but when things calmed down, so did their special efforts concerning minority students. Middlebury has maintained its special recruitment efforts as well as its special academic and social support program. A couple of years ago, Dartmouth decided to reinstitute its special prefreshman program for minority students; and until recently, some of our NESCAC schools were without special admissions efforts vis-a-vis minority students. Our minority graduates go on to lead happy, productive and successful lives. Yet when we talk with these alumni, we infrequently hear comments reflecting a happy, fun four years like those of their white counterparts. Rather, their experiences were marked by difficult struggles, and the kind of joy that comes from having overcome obstacles. Minority students are changing in terms of their socio-economic profiles, but the problems that some experience at Middlebury are largely unchanged.

It is important to keep in mind that all minority students do not have the same experiences at Middlebury College. Some come from socio-economic backgrounds much like those of the "typical" Middlebury student. Thus, they can assimilate into mainstream life within the first few weeks of their being here.

The group to whom this report gives attention represents about half of the minority student population (About a quarter of the remaining group is difficult to gauge, and the other quarter might represent the more integrated group.)

I have outlined some areas that I see as problematic to our efforts to retain and recruit minority students.

Retention

1. Numbers - There are so few minority students (last count, 48) that they continue to speak of feelings of isolation, alienation, etc. It is also tempting for the larger community to make generalizations about this group given such limited exposure to minority students.

2. Minority Faculty - We are doing very poorly in this area in spite of recommendations over the past 15 years from the King and Twilight reports. Only once in the history of Middlebury have we had more than one minority faculty member during a fall or spring term; too often there are terms when there are no minority faculty.

3. Money - For many in this group, money pressures are intense. Students are stunned by the realization of the total annual costs of attending this college and the extent of their personal financial obligation. Also, the awareness of the disparity between members of their economic group and the affluent majority is overwhelming. Economic differences contribute significantly to adjustment problems for minority students at Middlebury College.

4. Social Activities - Because minority students are unrepresented on student committees which decide the major social events, their tastes and interests may not be evidenced in the social programming of the college. This siutation can contribute to an attitude among minority students that they exist in this community as an afterthought.

5. Attrition - Attrition is fairly high for this group (Total attrition rate for the period 1980-86 is 37 percent. Lowest attrition for any class was 11 percent; highest attrition for any class was 64 percent.) Such high attrition has a negative impact on students who remain, thereby reinforcing high rates of attrition.

6. Stereotypes/Prejudice - Minority students continue to experience instances of racism, stereotyping and prejudice both in and outside of the classroom. Recent programs are giving attention to race relations vis-a-vis black and white students, but more needs to be done to improve the atmosphere between these groups. Few initiatives have been directed towards relationships between black students and white faculty and staff.

7. Academic - Minority students represent varying degrees of academic strength. Some are what might be described as educationally disadvantaged because of the high schools that they had to attend. Therefore, academic survival at a school which has the academic calibre of Middlebury requires extraordinary efforts and motivation from these students; it is difficult to make the grade and many do not.

Recruitment

1. Numbers - Small numbers of minority students serve to discourage prospective minority students from wanting to attend Middlebury.

2. Minority Faculty - Minority students and their parents are looking for significant role models and adult support structures.

3. Money - Good applicants can go to other schools and get a first rate education with smaller financial indebtedness in the future. Additionally, they (and their parents) may find more appealing a community in which the situation of

not having money is an approved standard.

4. Minority Student Pool
   a) Many of the black students we seek are sought by schools which are better known by black students.
   b) Pool of black students is shrinking; pool of Hispanic students is increasing.
5. Liberal Arts - Many minority students are looking for vocational, technical training, or a degree program that prepares them for specific occupations (according to those who visit during our special minority recruitment weekends).

Following is a discussion of the problems which reflect my perception of the situation as it concerns minority students over the past five years.

The problem of having small numbers of minority students continues to challenge our relentless efforts and moral commitment to increase the size of this group. It is a problem that perpetuates itself. We have small numbers, students experience isolation, racial pressure, etc.; they do poorly academically and/or elect to leave; prospective students are discouraged by small numbers and absence of community. Dr. Rita Dudley, a black psychologist who visited our campus a few years ago, pointed out that our situation will never seriously improve for blacks until either the numbers of people of color are significantly increased, or the profiles of students change. She pointed out that psychologically many of our minority students experience powerlessness in the presence of insignificant numbers and in the absence of significant role models.

Much research has been conducted over recent years examining the role of white colleges versus black college vis-a-vis success rates with black students. The data seem to suggest that black students achieve more in black colleges because the environment is evenly supportive and conducive to the development of positive self esteem. When taken out of a situation that creates an atmosphere of inferiority, black students are found to excel.

When numbers are small, minority students are overburdened to represent their racial group in classroom and social/cultural situations. BSU members, for example, almost consistently do poorly in grades in part because of the enormous effort that they direct towards the preservation of their organization. For them, this campus structure represents a supportive experience and a powerful black tradition, and therefore carries grave importance.

Dating is another social problem within this group. While approximately equal numbers of men and women are admitted in the freshman class, the dropout rate of men is higher than that of women. In her recent book, Blacks in Colleges, Jacqueline Fleming says this about black male students:

> "The data indicate that on most predominately white college campuses, there are few black men, especially among seniors. Furthermore, we know that on predominately white campuses, black males are often undergoing depressive reactions that cause them to withdraw academically and psychologically."

The female/male ratio sometimes moves drastically out of sync, as with the Class of '85. That freshman group opened with a ratio of 2:1 for women to men; the ratio was 3:1 for the three subsequent years due to higher male attrition. This situation created another layer of stress for this group. Of course the problem of higher attrition rates for men is not limited to minority students, but the problem becomes more crucial when numbers are so small.

In a sense, we almost have to expect a higher rate of attrition within the minority student group because we admit a fair number of students whose profiles forecast academic and social adjustment difficulties. However, we have to ask

ourselves are we in fact doing all that we can to meet the areas of weakness for this group. Presently, we have the Pre-Enrollment Program, which is a prefreshman program geared primarily for students (originally minority) who show academic weakness or who indicate some social adjustment problems. The Program is useful for giving students a preview of what is to come. Specifically, they can experience the rigors of college courses, be introduced to classroom dynamics, experience an intense academic atmosphere, and begin to adjust socially. Realistically speaking, we cannot hope to substantially improve their cognitive skills in three weeks, but we can gain the information necessary to advise them more appropriately throughout the freshman year. Some students may be permitted to take only three courses during the academic year. But this does not always improve prospects for success. For example, it a student needs to drop a course, he might realize it around the middle of the term. Efforts to save that course may have caused him to neglect the others. He is perhaps allowed special dispensation and is permitted to drop down to two. He may receive a D in one of the two remaining courses, which would mean academic failure. This could be mortifying; his self confidence would be shaken. If he returns, it is on probation; he is encouraged to take a full load of four courses without having had the opportunity to experience success with only two.

Witnessing the large exit of their classmates through attrition has negative effects on minority students. They recognize the possibility that they could meet with a similar end. This feeling of insecurity causes them to question their competency, behave passively, or feel angry at the institution for not caring about them, mistreating them, or allowing things to go out of control in their domain.

Now that the College has its open door policy as regards financial aid, white administrators are beginning to recognize the financial hardships that many financial aid students weather

in their efforts to complete their education at Middlebury. The problems are old for minority students. They are asked to contribute summer earnings when, for some, employment options are very limited. When summer earnings requirements cannot be met, the parents are expected to absorb it in their self-help contribution. The student is also required to work on campus to contribute to the self-help obligation, regardless of the level of academic weakness. This student finds little time for extracurricular involvement, but when she does she may want to socialize with other black students, perhaps at other campuses. Because very few black students have cars, they cannot enjoy the luxury of a relief from this campus. As a result, this group often feels entrapped.

I am sure the Admission staff can describe much better than I the problems of getting minority students to Middlebury. However, I have learned through professional sources that the pool of black applicants is declining for several reasons; among them being:

1. rising costs of attending college.
2. cuts to programs that sought and trained black high school students who had low scores but showed promise.
3. cuts to financial programs specifically directed towards educating black students.

Though all of these problems are significant, I am especially distressed by one; namely, that access to higher education is becoming limited for black students. In a nationwide response to charges that colleges are graduating illiterate adults, state schools in particular are beginning to toughen admissions standards. According to a recent article in the New York Times Magazine:

> "As admissions standards have stiffened in state colleges across the country, students with inferior public-school educations have been caught in the standards squeeze and denied admission."

This situation seems to predict that quality colleges, like Middlebury, will have to join in the mad scramble to attract

applicants from the small pool of qualified black students (presumably educated by private and parochial schools).

Inasmuch as the pool of Hispanic students is increasing in proportion to changes in the national census figures, we might begin to direct more attention to this group. Our experience here at Middlebury shows that black and Hispanic students get along very well together. They appear to have an affinity for each other and are found working together on social and cultural efforts. It would seem to me, therefore, that to increase the numbers of Hispanics would serve to improve (to some degree) the problems facing black students on this campus.

As I have noted, small numbers of minority students and minority faculty have negative effects on our efforts to recruit minority students. Brent Staples, editor of New York Times Magazine, says about small numbers of black students and faculty:

> "An unfortunate cycle is perpetuated: The fewer black faculty members and administrators there are, the fewer role models and recruiters exist to attract the next generation of blacks to college campuses."

Our financial aid package, while competitive with the other overlap schools, is still seen as a drawback to attending Middlebury. Middlebury does not have the prestige in the eyes of many black students as schools like Dartmouth and Williams; therefore, if we all offer the same package, it might make more sense to them to go to one of our competitors. Students for whom practical matters are more overriding simply elect to go to another institution outside of the overlap group which offers a more attractive financial aid package (larger grant, smaller loan portion, smaller self-help requirements).

I am aware of our having lost within the past two years four minority students due to financial reasons. Loan figures of $2,000 per year are staggering to some of these students, many of whom come from economically limited backgrounds. Financial payments are also difficult for parents of first generation college students, even when their gross annual incomes indicate an ability to pay. These parents often have not had the experience of managing money in a way that prepares them to appropriate $15,000 for a year of tuition. (A year ago, a black student was asked to leave after the term began when his parents were unable to pay the tuition bill. They grossed over $50,000 a year with their positions as city workers. This situation was humiliating for the student in question, dismaying to other students and a surprise to some deans. Our institutional structure seems to have failed this student.)

What we can do to Improve the Picture

1. Increase numbers of minority students on Middlebury College campus.

   A. Broaden the pool of prospective black students by reinstating programs to help make talented public school students college-ready.

   B. Actively recruit Hispanic students after defining those most compatible (Puerto Ricans vs. Cubans, etc.) with this group.

   C. Recruit from two-year educational institutions.

   D. Intensify recruitment efforts in the student profile areas presently pursued, involving a variety of resources;

      1. more admissions staff.

      2. minority and white alumni.

      3. high school counselors.

      4. professional recruiters (John B. Hoffman, for example, finds talented students with atypical educational profiles and feeds them into the best prep schools around the country. He is one of many such active, and successful recruiters.)

      5. civic, religious, fraternal organizations.

2. Increase numbers of minority role models, particularly in faculty positions.

   A. Both minority students and white students would benefit by the presence of minorities in signifcant roles in this community:

      1. feelings of self-worth should be improved for minority students.

      2. minorities would be legitimized in the eyes of many white students.

3. atmosphere of race relations improves when all groups are institutionally ratified as being valid and equal in this community.

4. increased numbers of minority adults serve to attract other adults as well as students.

B. Some mechanisms for increasing the numbers of minority faculty and staff are:

1. aggressively recruit black and other minority faculty. (Consider recommendations of previous presidential committees.)

2. explore additional short-term teaching opportunities like the Winter Term Visiting Lecturers Program.

3. explore faculty/staff exchange possibilities.

4. offer more courses throughout the curriculum which give special attention to the black experience in America.

3. Stabilize numbers of minority students on campus.

A. Reexamine the academic support structure for this group:

1. reinstitute a special freshman curriculum/load.

2. establish a system of loco parentis advising for those who need it.

3. explore exchange opportunities with schools which have large populations of minority students.

B. Reevaluate financial aid structure for certain minority students:

1. reduce level of loan requirment.

2. decide whether students who are weak academically should be required to work (especially during the freshman year).

3. arrive at an answer to the question, "What are our financial responsibilities to needy students once

we bring them here?"

C. Give special attention to special social needs of this group:

1. try to involve minority students in social activity decision making.

2. offer support for social needs with sensitivity to the limited financial resources of this group.

3. pay special attention to adjustment needs of black men.

4. consider whether the time has come to evaluate the structure of Black Student Union, which over recent years seems to attract few of our black students. (As it now stands, one of the potentially most important support structures we have in place seems not to be serving a support function for most.)

   a) Might the group widen to include Hispanic and Asian students, recognizing that students from other backgrounds may have common needs and insecurities?

   b) Is a BSU vital in any real or symbolic way in terms of what it represents to prospective students, current students, and alumni?

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The further we are separated in time from the lessons of the civil rights movement, the more difficult it may be for members of this community to appreciate the moral responsibility that rests with leading educational institutions to keep the hands of progress from being turned backwards. Thus, it may become necessary to periodically reaffirm on an institutional level the commitment of the College to its black and minority community.

(Appendix A)

Minority Students

Enrollment/Attrition Figures

July, 1986/AA

Class	# Enrolled	# Graduated	% Not Graduated of Enrolled
1973	20	13	35%
1974	21	17	19%
1975	32	22	31%
1976	23	18	22%
1977	27	18	33%
1978	20	11	45%
1979	22	12	45%
1980	17	12	29%
1981	27	19	30%
1982	22	11	50%
1983	22	8	64%
1984	19	17	11%
1985	21	13	38%
1986	14	7	36%
*1987	21	-	24%
*1988	17	-	24%

* Attrition figures for classes currently enrolled are shown for discussion purposes.

(Appendix B)

Minority Students

Attrition Figures by Sex

July, 1986/AA

Men	Class	Total	#grad	Withdrew	Attrition
	1980	7	5	2	29%
	1981	14	9	5	36%
	1982	12	6	6	50%
	1983	15	5	10	67%
	1984	7	7	0	0%
	1985	8	4	4	50%
	1986	7	2 (2 here)	3	43%
	1987	8		3	38%
	1988	8		2	25%
	1989	5			
	1990				

Women	Class	Total	#grad	Withdrew	Attrition
	1980	10	7	3	30%
	1981	13	10	3	23%
	1982	10	5	5	50%
	1983	7	3	4	57%
	1984	12	10	2	17%
	1985	13	9	4	31%
	1986	7	5	2	29%
	1987	13		2	15%
	1988	9		2	22%
	1989	8			
	1990				

BothM&W	Class	Total	#grad	Withdrew	Attrition
	1980	17	12	5	29%
	1981	27	19	8	30%
	1982	22	11	11	50%
	1983	22	8	14	64%
	1984	19	17	2	11%
	1985	21	13	8	38%
	1986	14	7	5	36%
	1987	21		5	24%
	1988	17		4	24%
	1989	13			
	1990				

(Appendix C)

Total Minority Students

per Academic Year

July, 1986/AA

Academic Year	#s Minority Students
1985-86	48
1984-85	59
1983-84	63
1982-83	55
1981-82	64
1980-81	65
1979-80	69
*1978-79	77
1977-78	64
1976-77	58
1975-76	60
1974-75	65
1973-74	73
1972-73	72
1971-72	73
1970-71	52
1969-70	34

* Figures after the year '79-'80 may be slightly skewed because of the inclusion of an occasional African student.